

**AMERICAN FORCES VIETNAM NETWORK (AFVN)
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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AUTHORIZATION AND ORGANIZATION OF AFVN

The mission of the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) is to provide U. S. forces operating in the Republic of Vietnam with programs of information, education and entertainment which would not otherwise be available to them.

The AFVN is authorized by the Directorate for Information for the Armed Forces (IAF) to broadcast radio and television programs. The Directorate for IAF is responsible to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs which has responsibility for the military's internal information programs.

AFRTS outlets such as the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) are administered, maintained and operated by one or more of the component commands with proportionate staffing and funding. While program and information materials to include news feeds from commercial sources are provided by AFRTS-Los Angeles and AFRTS-Washington, the Commander of U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, is responsible for the operation of the AFVN. MACV Directive 360-4, 18 April 1969, subject: American Forces Vietnam Network Policies, Procedures, and Responsibilities (TAB D) places AFVN under the operational control of the MACV Office of Information. Furthermore, AFVN is a staff division of the Office of Information, MACV. Each affiliate station is assigned an Officer in Charge who receives command and operating instructions from the Officer-In-Charge of AFVN.

The MACV Chief of Information, acting for COMUSMACV and in accordance with MACV Directive 360-4, in the past exercised operational control over AFVN, and presently establishes general policies and guidance for AFVN operations and issues directives and other instructions to the major (component) commands which are assigned responsibility for supporting AFVN operations in the field.

Supervision exercised through operational control is primarily concerned with adherence to policy rather than specific procedures. The recent MACV Inspector General investigation into Specialist Five Robert E. Lawrence's allegations concerning operations at AFVN determined that operational control was not a sufficiently close means of supervision over the AFVN.

Consequently, it was recommended that MACOI assume command control of the AFVN as a means of maintaining more open lines of communication and to better ensure understanding of and compliance with specific procedures. It is emphasized that there has been no change in policies, simply a clarification and improvement of procedures.

Individuals in the AFVN have been fully apprised of the policies under which AFVN operates and those who do not accept those policies are identified and transferred to duties outside of the AFVN commensurate with their qualifications and training.

AFVN News Policies and Procedures

The public information policy of the Department of Defense demands maximum disclosure of information except for that which would be of material assistance to potential enemies (Memorandum for DOD Secretaries, Subject: Freedom of Information, 1 May 1967, TAB A). The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs is charged with the responsibility for implementing the policy of assuring that nothing inhibits the flow of unclassified information to the American public.

The memorandum further states that members of the Armed Forces constitute an important segment of the American public and are thus entitled to the same unrestricted access to news as are all other citizens. It is important to note that the maximum disclosure policy is qualified to prevent dissemination of news which would be of material assistance to the enemy.

This, of course, takes on particular significance here in Vietnam where the enemy is largely within the broadcast range of the American Forces Vietnam Network.

The memorandum also prohibits the calculated withholding of unfavorable news stories and wire service reports from internal publications such as STARS AND STRIPES and Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) outlets.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs is directed to take all necessary steps to ensure a free flow of information to U.S. forces and, according to the memorandum, news management and

"meddling" with the news will not be tolerated in either the internal or external information programs.

Department of Defense Instruction 5120.20, 13 July 1962, Subject: Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) (TAB B), stipulates that news material will be selected on the basis of its objectivity. The general guidance for selection of news items is that newscasts will be based on balanced coverage of principal news developments and will not contain editorializing, analysis, commentary or sensationalism. When opinions are expressed, the source will be identified. News shall be factual, accurate and at all times impartial. The guidance emphasizes there must be no appeal to emotions detrimental to the interests of the United States.

The above policy guidance is incorporated in the Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) Instruction 5720.12, 29 April 1968, Subject: Armed Forces Radio and Television (AFRT) (TAB C). The CINCPAC Instruction further defines news policy for AFRT stations by stating that "care will be exercised in the selection of news sources to insure that the sources provide accurate and reliable news." This, in essence, makes the AFRT stations responsible for not misinforming the U.S. forces by airing news that is inaccurate or from unreliable sources.

The CINCPAC guidance requires that news analysis or commentary be clearly identified in such a manner as to distinguish them from hard news items. The instruction clearly states that programs of commentary and news analysis will not be prepared by AFRT networks or outlets. Furthermore, AFRT networks or outlets will not express network or outlet editorial opinion.

Attribution for newscasts is considered quite important to ensure that

the distinction is made between news obtained from public news media (wire services, commercial networks or local news agencies) and that obtained from official sources.

The DOD and CINCPAC news policy guidance is further defined in the MACV Directive 360-4, 18 April 1969, Subject: American Forces Vietnam Network Policies, Procedures and Responsibilities, (TAB D) to provide specific guidance for the operation of AFVN. The Officer-in-Charge of AFVN is charged with the responsibility for developing network news policies which are subject to approval of the command (MACV). Each affiliate station OIC will adhere to the network and local news policies. Additionally, MACV Directive 360-4 stipulates that all hard news copy concerning Vietnam war news must be checked and cleared by the MACV Office of Information before it is broadcast by any station in the AFVN.

The MACV Office of Information, AFRT Standing Operating Procedure, 19 November 1969, (TAB E), incorporates the policies from DOD, CINCPAC and MACV memoranda, instructions and directives. The SOP stipulates the procedures used in selecting and preparing news items for broadcast over AFVN. These procedures, of course, reflect the fact that the AFVN operates within a host country environment and in a combat zone. Furthermore, AFVN is an official internal information medium. Consequently, it is necessary for all Vietnam war news to be based on official press releases and/or press briefings by the MACV Office of Information (MACOI).

Under no circumstances is wire service or commercial network information used unless the facts are first checked with MACOI to ensure accuracy with respect to official operational reports filed from the field to the MACV Command Operations Center.

Those news items concerning Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) actions which are not obtained from military press releases are checked through the RVNAF National Press Center. If there is any doubt concerning the accuracy of an all RVNAF combat action, the facts are checked with MACOI which receives official reports in the MACV Command Operations Center on RVNAF military activities.

AFVN cannot announce U. S. troop movements unless they are released through official U. S. military channels. AFVN must also observe all embargoes stipulated by releasing authorities. These are the same embargoes observed by the civilian press corps in Vietnam. Coverage of riots, rallies or demonstrations is derived only from commercial or military sources which are not a part of the AFVN. Additionally, news bulletins are handled in a straight news fashion; however, those bordering on the sensational must be cleared by the MACV Chief of Information or his designated representative.

Within the framework of factual and objective reporting, those making editorial decisions in selecting news should consider the best interests of the U. S. Government and the U. S. national objectives since AFVN is an official medium.

Those who select the news items for broadcast must also keep in mind host country sensitivities. Even though the AFVN's primary audience is comprised of the U. S. forces in Vietnam, the network operates on the air waves controlled by the Government of Vietnam and receives authorization from the GVN to operate on certain frequencies. Moreover, the Vietnamese people are exposed to whatever is broadcast over AFVN. For these reasons, certain subject

matter with either political or military ramifications is considered to be sensitive and will be treated appropriately. This does not, however, prohibit the use of material which is unfavorable to the host country. The application of these criteria requires judgments which in some cases could well eliminate unfavorable stories concerning the host country. The record shows, however, that there has been considerable commentary originated by commercial sources which has been unfavorable to the Republic of Vietnam and this commentary has been broadcast over AFVN.

The system used by AFVN for selecting news stories for broadcast is one which conforms to the policies of the Department of Defense, Command in Chief Pacific and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam as well as to the principle of providing valid sampling of the accurate reports of developments both here in Vietnam and elsewhere in the world.

In analyzing the allegations of censorship, the MACV Inspector General's investigation required Specialist Five Lawrence to indicate specific instances of censorship which he or others had observed. There were 23 such instances cited for a six-month period. Of these, a number of the items had actually been broadcast. In the case of those which were not broadcast, there were valid reasons for not using them and there was no pattern to the reasons which would indicate a policy of not using certain types of stories. In no case did the news item which was not used favor or hurt any group nor did failure to use them have any discernable impact on the military audience.

The 23 cases cited compare with a total of 180,000 news items screened

and some 12,000 news items broadcast over AFVN during the same six-month period for a total of some 700 hours of news broadcasts.

While the MACV Office of Information through the AFVN is charged with the responsibility of providing balanced, accurate coverage of the principal news developments, it is of paramount importance that those who make editorial decisions be particularly cognizant of their responsibility to not misinform their primary audience, the American troops. The ramifications of misinforming troops in a combat zone can be most serious. While there may not be an immediate effect from an inaccurate news story, the rumors which result and the inaccurate or incorrect information which is passed on to others by word of mouth could result in behavior or actions which could mean serious injury and loss of life not to mention confusion and distress.

An example of a story which was not broadcast over AFVN was one concerning the allegations by a U.S. Congresswoman that U.S. forces in Vietnam had been issued defective flak vests. An examination by the Command of these allegations revealed that the flak vests did meet qualifications and specifications. To broadcast a story concerning these fallacious allegations over an official government medium from one who would likely be perceived by the troops as a credible source could have had wide-ranging and very serious effects.

A loss of confidence in the protective capabilities of the flak vest could have been very damaging to the morale of the combat soldiers. Even more seriously, as a result of hearing the news story directly or by word of mouth, some men may have discarded their vests in the belief that they were in fact defective. This could well have resulted in needless injury or death of U.S. servicemen.

Quite obviously, the decision not to release the flak vest story over AFVN was made because the network broadcasts to soldiers in a combat environment. On the other hand, though there was evidence that the Congresswoman's allegations were not supported by fact, the decision to broadcast the story with proper attribution over an AFRT outlet operating in a non-combat environment may have been different than the decision made here in Vietnam where lives are at stake.

This example underscores the fact that editorial decisions are matters which require keen judgment and sometimes must be exercised by those at a sufficiently high level where information from a variety of sources is available. Furthermore, this example emphasized the fact that those responsible for making editorial judgments must consider the possible adverse effects broadcasting inaccurate news might have on the physical welfare and morale of the servicemen and women of the command.

The application of the guidance and policies discussed herein quite obviously requires that persons serving in policy-making and editorial decision-making positions be both qualified and have access to the necessary information to make such decisions in the best interest of the U. S. forces served by the AFRTS.

Consequently, persons assigned to the information positions at which policy and editorial decisions are made have received formal education in the fields of journalism and/or mass communication and are experienced in the information field. They are by virtue of their educational background sensitive to the public's right to know. Moreover, these persons are experienced in the military operations field which is extremely valuable in making decisions in

the best security interests of the U. S. forces.

It is particularly important to note, for example, that the current MACV Chief of Information has been a commander in combat, earned his masters degree in journalism from the University of Missouri and most importantly, has served as Special Assistant for Southeast Asia to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs prior to assuming his present duties. In that position he was a participant in high -level decision-making at the White House, State Department, U. S. Information Agency, Department of Defense and the Defense Intelligence Agency concerning information policy and problems. Furthermore, he and others in key MACV information positions have access to the most recent information from the MACV Command Operations Center concerning the combat situation and have immediate access to information sources in the U. S. Embassy in Saigon and the Department of Defense.

Since the MACV Chief of Information is the delegated release authority for all information concerning U. S. military activities in the Republic of Vietnam and surrounding waters it is logical that he also be the one responsible for making the final decisions concerning information released over the American Forces Vietnam Network. The system is designed to provide highly competent men to fulfill the key decision-making positions such as the MACV Chief of Information and to place the releasing authority at the optimum level to insure a timely flow of releasable news to the free world press and to the U. S. forces serving in RVN in compliance with DOD, CINCPAC, and MACV policy directives.